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## **Locally Unwanted Sea Use: The Case of Syrian Chemical weapons disposal in the Mediterranean**

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## **Locally Unwanted Sea Use**

### **The Case of Syrian Chemical weapons disposal in the Mediterranean**

#### *Abstract*

This paper discusses the opposition to the disposal of Syrian chemical weapons in the Mediterranean Sea. Following insights from Green criminology and recent calls in that discipline for the inclusion of new social movements and resistance, it discusses in detail how the issue was framed in terms of environmental and ecological justice by different protest actors. This process is aided by an analytical model that brings together the sociology of protest and social movements, insights from reflexive modernisation and the study of southern European civil societies. Methodologically, the focus is on mobilisations that took place in Greece in general and the island of Crete in particular. Data have been harvested through the examination of online sources, such as newspapers, blogs and dedicated social networks. The analysis of the findings suggests that these mobilisations were initially stimulated by real concern, but subsequently these were only carried through by certain movement entrepreneurs who didn't hesitate to pepper these concerns with false claims and/or linkages to an already active anti-imperialist discourse.

*Key words:* LUSU, NIMBY, environmental/ecological justice, movement entrepreneurs, Syriza, Ecologists-Greens

#### *Introduction*

On 21 August 2013, the Ghouta suburbs of Damascus in Syria were bombed by the Syrian government with missiles containing the chemical agent sarin killing hundreds of civilians. The devastation of the attack was not missed by the UN team of inspectors that was already in Syria after the Syrian government had invited them to look into alleged chemical weapons use. It took four days after the attack and continuous selling and clashes between government and rebel forces for the declaration of a ceasefire that allowed the UN inspectors to visit and investigate sites of the attack. The UN mission confirmed that there was a significant use of the sarin gas in the attacks in the Ghouta area. After a protracted exchange of accusations between the Syrian government and the opposition for carrying out the attack, and an ongoing discussion in many countries about whether that warranted a military intervention, in September 2013, Syria declared that it intended to join the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and destroy its chemical weapons. By April 2014, the joint mission of the UN and The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) confirmed that although Syria had missed the agreed deadline, it had still managed to ship out or destroy 92.5% of its chemicals. Irrespective of that, doubts were expressed by some on whether Syria had declared the full size of its chemical arsenal or whether it had managed to store a different type of chemical to continue its attacks.

The ongoing conflict in Syria made the destruction of the chemical ammunition an impossible feat. This led to an attempt to find an alternative method being initiated, which culminated with the joint agreement by Norway and Denmark to transport the chemical weapons from Latakia in Syria, to the port of Gioia Tauro in the Calabrian region of Italy. From there the chemicals were given to the US

Navy for destruction in international waters in the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>1</sup> This paper discusses the protest mobilisation organised against that project. In particular, it identifies the key arguments employed by the main protest actors involved and links them to key points raised by theoretical discussions in green criminology, reflexive modernisation and civic engagement in the countries of the European South. The discussion culminates to an identification of environmental risk and harm as a typical source of social movement entrepreneurship with some elements linked to foul play and others to a general anti-systemic discourse tied to the anti-austerity wave of civil contestation that has engulfed Greece since 2010.

The discussion begins by debating the Locally Unwanted Sea Use (LUSU) idea by an examination of different perspectives outlined in the Locally Unwanted Land Use (LULU) perspective, which is very much the inspiration behind LUSU. As the local mobilisations against LULUs have been examined through the employment of the NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard) or environmental/ecological justice frames, the discussion proceeds to an appraisal of these concepts and ponders their usefulness in the LUSU context under examination here. Subsequently, we move to an overview of the characteristics of environmental movements and protest in Southern Europe in general and Greece in particular, which allows for a more in-depth appraisal of the protest claims made in the mobilisations under examination here. The protest claims and information about the actors involved have been sourced by using online media and as such there is a brief interjection outlining the benefits and limitations of using that method.

#### *LULUs/LUSUs-NIMBY and environmental/ecological justice*

These mobilizations can be placed in the general context of campaigns against LULUs (Locally Unwanted/Undesirable Land Use), which here has been modified to LUSUs (Locally Unwanted/Undesirable Sea Use) across the world. The immediate questions that one is confronted with, in the case under study here, relates to the way that these mobilizations can be classified. Should they be classified as NIMBY mobilizations or as public campaigns linked to the environmental and/or ecological justice frame?

For instance, opposition to waste landfill sitting, a case of LULU, has been viewed by some as an irrational and selfish act by people wishing to avoid a reduction in the value of their property by living in close proximity to waste disposal sites. This is the interpretation that is usually attached to NIMBY mobilizations. Other interpretations employ a different viewpoint that sees these acts as exemplars of civic democratic praxis (McClymont, 2008; Schively, 2007, p. 257). After all, in a free-market context with the glorification of the actions taken by rational decision makers, this kind of action can hardly be castigated for being selfish. Moreover, in many cases the local resistance is expressed in a very rational calculative wait, albeit with complete absence of any indicators of selfishness. In contrast, this protest action tends to be based on concerns about fairness and the actual necessity for such a development (Lober, 1993; Lober, 1995; Rootes, 2007). Still, the more sceptical among us are bound to suggest that local campaigners employ these claims in order to disguise the aforementioned “selfish” reasons that truly underpin their mobilizations (see Burningham, 2000; Hubbard, 2003; Botetzagias & Karamichas, 2009).

Leaving aside this highly plausible scenario, some studies have identified that mistrust towards the government and expert authorities is what has stimulated protest action (Hunter & Leyden, 1995), and usually that is also supported by a sense that the distribution of the negatives is unfair and inequitable (Lober, 1993; Lober, 1995; Lober & Green, 1994).

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<sup>1</sup> This information was gathered by perusing various news websites.

The latter perception has historically developed to what is known as the environmental justice movement (EJM). The emergence of that movement can be traced back to the 1980s in the USA, and has been seen by some as a reinvention of the Civil Rights movement (see Capek, 1993; Pellow, 2000). It's interesting to note that environmental justice is central in green criminology and White (2008, pp. 16-17) offers the following definition:

*Environmental justice* refers to the distribution of environments among peoples in terms of access to and use of specific natural resources in defined geographical areas, and the impacts of particular social practices and environmental hazards on specific populations (e.g. as defined on the basis of class, occupation, gender, age, ethnicity). In other words, the concern is with human beings at the centre of analysis. The focus of analysis therefore is on human health and well-being, and how these are affected by particular types of production and consumption.

However, although White (2013, p. 27-28) acknowledges that a green criminology,

[a]pproach presses the need for transnational activism, with an emphasis on fundamental social change. What counts is engagement in strategies that will challenge dominant authority structures and those modes of production that are linked to environmental degradation and destruction, negative transformations of nature, species decline, and threats to biodiversity. *Social movements are seen to be vital in dealing with instances of green environmental harm* (my emphasis).

He appears to represent a minority within the green criminology community. In fact, few have taken up the challenge 'to examine either (new) social movements or resistance or both' (Brisman and South, 2014, p. 89). This paper partially takes up the challenge by bringing insights from social movements and protest studies in the examination of the civil contestation that erupted over the destruction of Syrian chemicals in the Mediterranean. However, before embarking on that quest, it's important to clarify certain issues linked to the attempt to situate the LUSU mobilisations under study here in the NIMBY – EJM polarity (dichotomy, one may say) that has marked their LULU counterparts.

In his discussion on the environmental justice perspective, White (2008, p. 16) brings in the view point put forward by Beck (1992, p. 36) - through his famous dictum 'poverty is hierarchic, smog is democratic' - on the equalising effect of some environmental risks (ozone depletion, nuclear fallout, global warming etc.). Ulrich Beck's very influential to social theory reflexive modernisation is a perspective that he developed independently (Beck, 1992; 1995), albeit in the same period, with Anthony Giddens (Giddens, 1990; 1991). Giddens was also examining the challenges of late modernity with the environmental issue also playing a key role in his formulations. That way both social theorists stand together in any discussions that pay attention to the role that has been played by reflexivity in upgrading the status of the environmental problematic from a pariah status to a key component in social theory.

Most importantly, reflexivity reverberates throughout the NIMBY and environmental justice frameworks as the risk and lack of trust to expert authorities, which usually stimulates these protest mobilisations are also two essential components of this perspective. For instance, scientific evidence and expertise are called upon by both the proponents of the project under contestation and the mobilisers and in Beck's risk perspective; science holds the ambivalent status of being both the principle party responsible for many environmental hazards and risks facing contemporary societies, and the source where one can find solutions for their amelioration. In his attempt to offer a diachronic examination on that phenomenon, Beck supports that in earlier stages of modernity

there was an unchallenged trust and deference to expert authorities. That has been shaken in late modernity due to the experience of some manufactured environmental risks with high impact (The Chernobyl incident for e.g.). Giddens sees trust to experts as part of a desire by the people for normalcy. This trust is broken by events outside local control, which encourage the creation of ad hoc local challenging groups.

On this issue, and in light of the fact that we are dealing with a LUSU here, it's worth bringing into the fore the following elaboration that was made by White and Heckenberg (2014, p. 71):

Environmental harm may originate in specific location, but, due to natural processes of water and air movement and flow, it can spread to other parts of a city, region, country or continent. A localized problem thus contains the seeds of a global dilemma. Environmental harm such as dioxins in water is both temporal and spatial in nature. That is, the harm itself actually moves across time and space, covering wide areas and with long-lasting effects. Moreover, toxins accumulate over time. In other words, there is a cumulative impact on waterways and aquatic life, and small amounts of poison may eventually lead to great concentration of toxicity in fish and other living creatures of the water, with major social consequences for fishers and human consumers of fish.

With that in mind, we can expect that opposition against a LUSU may move beyond the confines of the local/ national in both its blame attribution and the actors composing the resultant protest movement. In this more globalised context, mistrust towards expert authorities can be multidimensional. In relation to that, it's worth bringing to our attention work produced by scholars who have used reflexivity and Beck's risk society thesis to explain civic contestation against LULUs (Haris Ali, 1997; Baxter et al., 1999). These studies argue that public scepticism on the reassurances offered by relevant experts on the safety, environmental viability and economic potential of the project is what has stimulated civic contestation. In addition, it is suggested that lack of trust targets local, regional, national institutional and technical experts involved in the decision-making process but could also be part of a general mistrust in the system's capacity to identify and protect against potential risks. On this issue, green criminology tends to suggest that attempts to quell that mistrust tend to employ the nebulous concept of sustainable development to frame the discussion in a way that only scientific expertise is valued and alternative viewpoints are disregarded (White, 2008, p. 73). Moreover, even in policy regimes where the 'precautionary principle' is accepted that is conditioned by various interpretations that range from its integration 'into the regulatory and legal frameworks of the European Union', its lower popularity in the USA (White & Heckenberg 2014, p. 167) and continuous pressures to bypass it when it's put into effect (see for e.g. Walters, 2006). Ultimately when sustainability and/or the 'precautionary principle' are brought in assessing environmental credentials, the outcome is contingent upon the balance of a range of socio-political factors (see White, *ibid*). These issues are extremely important when one embarks on an examination of civil contestation in the southern European context as the countries of the European south have been associated with certain cultural characteristics that were intimately linked to lack of trust to anything other than the local and the familial.

#### *Environmental movements/protest southern Europe/Greece*

For many years, an inevitable component of any type of engagement with environmental mobilisations in Southern Europe was to comment on the 'Mediterranean Syndrome' (MS) (La Spina & Sciortino, 1993) and 'Southern Problem' (Pridham & Cini, 1994) formulations. If the significant economic growth that these countries experienced in the first decade of the 2000s, and the modernisation rhetoric that accompanied it, gave support to a delusion that they had moved away

from their peripheral status in the EU; but the global economic crisis of 2008 forcefully brought a wake-up call, which was a reminder that the weaknesses identified by those formulations were still present and/or that they couldn't be swept under the carpet any longer. In other words, the perennial problems of southern European societies that both formulations have identified as inhibiting them from complying with European Union (EU) environmental directives, such as

the lack of civic culture that can translate into an interest in engagement with collective goods that do not directly impact in what is seen as the familial and local, and the permeation of patronage and clientelist practices into the public administration which often result in the latter's inept functioning (Karamichas, 2007, p. 522).

When adopting a line of thinking which purports that, 7 years after these lines were written, Greece still suffers from these limitations then one may find perfect sense in two mutually exclusive comments made by two publications when the global economic crisis hit Greece in 2010. The first set of comments was made on a series of articles on the Greek crisis in *Times Magazine* (Tsiantar, 2010; Crumley, 2010). In these articles the crisis was seen as a 'blessing in disguise'. The second item has been taken by an article in *The Guardian*. In that article, Wachman (2010) sees Greece as a 'canary in the coalmine'. That metaphor sides with the view that Greece, rather than being the exception, it is actually the victim of a systemic crisis that is bound to engulf other countries with similar outcomes, including the initiation of austerity measures that are supposedly designed to avert other countries from facing the same situation that the Greek public has been experiencing.

The latter is more or less taken in the metaphor employed by the *Times Magazine* item, but it is taken a step further. It suggests that, in the long run, the suffering experienced by the Greek people was part of the sacrifices that they had to make in order to bring Greece out of the extremely undesirable situation that the country found itself to be in since 2010. That would clearly be a 'blessing' in facilitating the essential prerequisites in capitalist investment and growth realisation, but could also be a 'blessing' in that it could tackle the aforementioned characteristics of the MS. From the moment that the Greek predicament was announced with the accompanying continuous austerity cuts, Greece has experienced an immense wave of social contestation. Key actors in this protest wave subscribe to the 'canary in the coalmine' metaphor and see the Greek crisis as one manifestation of a system crisis. For these actors, any contentious issue can be located within that frame. Similarly, this paper argues that the contention on the LUSU under study here has also been appropriated and framed by these actors.

However, before we fully substantiate this, we can tease out more characteristics on the character of environmental social contestation in the Greek context. We can start by bringing to our attention the fact that one of the first challenges to the obsession with the characteristics of MS as an incurable condition that permeates southern European societies was mounted by a student of Greek civil society (Close, 1998; 1999) who identified a significant increase- but still cross-nationally low - in the number of ENGOs and active membership in them by the Greek public that led him to the conclusion that the environmental problem has strengthened Greek civil society. Another scholar challenged the strength of the MS thesis in the Greek case by arguing that Greek civil society cannot be measured by using traditional quantitative indicators as these have failed to capture the informal character of civil society that is manifested through acts of solidarity in times of unforeseen disasters (Sotiropoulos, 2004) like the devastating 2007 forest fires.

Closely connected to the issues that we outlined above, in relation to NIMBY mobilisations, is the fact that one of the issues that has been brought up on these types of protests in Greek localities is whether they can become part of concerted environmental action. Or are they just selfish reactions

against certain projects with a detrimental effect to the local environment, which was not repeated in other equally environmentally harmful projects; but with substantial financial gains for some locals (Karamichas, 2007, p. 523). Interestingly enough, a comparative study on environmental protest in Europe has demonstrated that southern Europeans have exhibited the highest propensity to engage in environmental protest in Western Europe from the late 1980s to the late 1990s (Kousis et al., 2001). This very interesting finding, further from challenging the weakness of Greek civil society/MS position, appears to further substantiate it; after all, the high incidence of protest signifies the failure of a civil society to act as an effective interlocutor between the societal and the institutional. This failure and the specificities of MS have continued to mark environmental protest action in Greece. Only since 2010 this takes place alongside the added social contestation caused by the adverse situation that Greece found itself to be in. The result is that what was before an ad hoc local mobilisation since, at least, 2010 is peppered with a discourse that is more conducive to protest actors that subscribe to an anti-system viewpoint. As the discussion on the gathered data demonstrates below this is very much the case in the LUSU under study here.

### *Method*

The method that we employed in order to capture the main characteristics of the protest action taken against the destruction of Syria's chemicals in the Mediterranean is a qualitative analysis of online sources, ranging from protest claims found in activist websites and blogs to media reports and discussions (see Carmichael, 2008; Wakeford & Cohen, 2008). More specifically, relevant sites, blogs and discussion forums were observed from January to/and August 2014 ([see table 1](#)). The main limitation that one can identify in using that set of methods is that they cannot capture the views by local mobilizers in the way that participant observation and on site interviewing could have done. Nevertheless, even if such a method was employed, it wouldn't have gone any further than offering a small complement to the findings that were gathered through use of the online medium. All in all, our assertion is that the findings more than suffice for the purposes of this paper's objectives.

Table 1

#### Online sites and data

<a href="#">Agonas tis Kritis (Cretan Struggle)</a> <a href="#">Left Cretan newspaper</a> <a href="http://www.agonaskritis.gr">http://www.agonaskritis.gr</a>	<a href="#">Interviews with scientific experts from local university institutions</a>
<a href="#">Ataktos Logos (Disorganised/Naughty Discourse)</a> <a href="#">Left-libertarian blog spot</a> <a href="http://ataktoslogos.blogspot.co.uk/">http://ataktoslogos.blogspot.co.uk/</a>	<a href="#">Critical commentary on the left – ecological activism</a>
<a href="#">Echo, Cretan radio station available on YouTube</a> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3VuD5sLrP">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3VuD5sLrP</a>	<a href="#">Interviews with scientific experts from local university institutions</a>
<a href="#">e-Krete, Cretan News network</a> <a href="http://www.ekriti.gr">http://www.ekriti.gr</a>	<a href="#">News coverage and interviews with activists and local MPs on the destruction of the Syrian</a>

	<a href="#"><u>chemical weapons in the Mediterranean</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>European parliament</u></a> <a href="http://www.europarl.europa.eu/"><u>http://www.europarl.europa.eu/</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Answers and questions on the destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons by MEPs and the European Commission</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Greenpeace (Greek Charter)</u></a> <a href="http://www.greenpeace.org/greece/el/news"><u>http://www.greenpeace.org/greece/el/news</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>The position of Greenpeace Greek Charter on the destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons in the Mediterranean</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Mia Krete (One Crete)</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Cretan environmental group</u></a> <a href="http://miakriti.gr"><u>http://miakriti.gr</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>The position of Mia Krete on the destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons in the Mediterranean and threats to Crete</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>NEA TV</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Cretan News Channel</u></a> <a href="http://www.neatv.gr"><u>http://www.neatv.gr</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Reports and commentary on the destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons and risks to the fishing industry</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Newsbomb</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Greek online newswire</u></a> <a href="http://www.newsbomb.gr"><u>http://www.newsbomb.gr</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>News coverage of protest action against the destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons in the Mediterranean</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>WWF Hellas</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Greek section of WWF</u></a> <a href="http://www.wwf.gr/"><u>http://www.wwf.gr/</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>The position of WWF Hellas on the destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons in the Mediterranean</u></a>

### *The Mobilisers*

The key organising figures behind the campaign against the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons were individuals situated in the left-libertarian/'new' politics family (see Kitschelt, 1988; Poguntke, 1987). In Greece that political cleavage is represented by the Coalition of Radical Left (Syriza) and the Ecologists-Greens (E-G) (see Karamichas, 2008). According to the latest opinion polls, in the summer of 2014, Syriza was standing in a very good position to form the next Greek government. In addition, Syriza achieved the highest electoral score in the 2014 European parliamentary elections (26.60%) whilst the O-G were trying to recap from very disappointing results in the same elections (0.90%). Both Syriza and O-G had started appearing as serious challengers to the monopoly of the two main parties in the 2007 national elections, which followed the devastating forest fires of the same year (see Karamichas, 2007). The increase in the electoral leverage of both parties in the 2007 national elections has been attributed to the following:

Syriza was the choice of many first-time voters as the party with a young leader that had actively supported the intense student mobilisations of the period; and, of course, all the other issues, including ecology, linked to the 'new' politics campaign repertoire. Although O-G were making steady inroads into the Greek political realm anyway, partly in lieu to the increased interest on climate change issue after the 2006 IPCC report and Al Gore's 'Inconvenient Truth', the forest fires



gave them an added boost that helped them elect the first ever Greek Green MEP in the 2009 European Parliament elections.

The coming in power of the socialist PASOK (Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement) in June 2009 did not pacify Syriza from continuing its support for protest action, ranging from student and labour issues to support for immigrants and refugees (see Rüdig & Karyotis, 2013). The entry of Greece into austerity after the admittance/realisation of the desperate position that the finances of the country were in, and the resultant intensification of protest politics, made Syriza the main force representing anti-austerity politics. In the double national elections of 2012, Syriza became the de facto party of the principal opposition (see Verney, 2014) while for O-G, intense factionalist conflict led to the party being unable to surpass the 3% electoral threshold and thus gain parliamentary entry. That failure led to further intensification of factionalist conflict, which was carried through the internal election for the selection of the head in the list of candidates for the 2014 European parliament elections. In that election, the faction composed by new party members defeated the group led by the elected MEP, Nikos Chrysogelos, by 2%; and Vaggelis Pissias, a self-described 'veteran activist of Greek social movements' and broadly known through his actions in trying to break the Israeli embargo in Gaza, but without any active role in the O-G ranks, was chosen to head the Euro-election list (Botetzagias, 2015). Subsequently, Chrysogelos resigned from the E-G and went to form another Green Party, "Prasinoi" (Greens) that participated in the 2014 European elections, achieving a really poor electoral yield. Pissias was the dominant persona in the campaign against the disposal of the Syrian chemical weapons in the Mediterranean. He was a movement entrepreneur (see Jenkins, 1983) who didn't hesitate to attempt boosting the campaign with completely false evidence.<sup>2</sup>

A quick look in the gathered material can easily spot an important change in the protest claim discourse employed by the mobilizers. Whereas in the first wave of mobilisations (January-March 2014), the protest discourse appears to have been concentrating on the risks entailed for the health and livelihood of people in Southern Greece or a radius from Western Crete to southern Peloponnese; in the second wave (March-August 2014), the protest discourse had expanded to include the impact that the project is likely to have in the whole of the Mediterranean, and has also been injected with more anti-systemic elements.

This following section traces the way that the aforementioned mistrust was expressed by the mobilising actors. In particular, it showcases how scientific reasoning was used and abused, appropriated and discarded whilst it was peppered with political rhetoric.

#### *Mistrust and Use of Scientific Reasoning in the First Wave (January-March 2014)*

The hydrolysis of Syrian chemicals on board Cape Ray was first brought to public attention on 9 January 2014 in an announcement made by the environmental citizens' group, "MIA KRETE" (ONE CRETE) based on a report found on the BBC news site (see MIA KRETE, 2014a). The days that followed were composed by participation in national and local TV programmes, and two open gatherings in two Cretan cities (Heraklion and Chania).

On 10 January 2014, Nikos Chrysogelos, the MEP of the E-G submitted the following set of questions to the European Commission:

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<sup>2</sup> When one considers the case under study here, the case of the 1995 Greenpeace campaign against the disposal of the Brent Spar oil platform in Atlantic waters comes in mind (see Hannigan, 2006). The main difference, of course, is that in the Brent Spar case the concerns by Greenpeace were mainly due to an overestimation of the quantities of oil in the platform while the case of the Syrian chemicals campaign Greenpeace along with others only raised some initial concerns and did not partake in the call for activism based on outright lies.

The first vessel bearing a cargo of Syria's chemical arsenal left the Syrian port of Latakia on 7 January 2014, bound for Italy, where the 'most critical' chemicals will be loaded on board the US maritime administration vessel, MV Cape Ray, and destroyed by hydrolysis in international waters between Italy, Greece, Libya and Malta. The entire operation is being coordinated by the United Nations and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Hundreds of tonnes of chemical weapons, including 'mustard gas' and the neurotoxic agent sarin, have to be destroyed, but Greek scientists have expressed reservations about whether these chemicals can be neutralised by hydrolysis alone. If the residues are disposed at sea, there are concerns about potential risks to ecosystems, fisheries, marine organisms and coastal zones. Hydrolysis has never been used on these chemicals, let alone at sea, and the Mediterranean is a closed sea, which has highly sensitive areas. The area where the chemicals are likely to be destroyed and the residues disposed of is an area noted for its biodiversity, coastal and fishing communities.

In view of the above, will the Commission say:

1. Is it aware of this plan? Has it received assurances in this connection from the relevant UN agencies and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons? Will the residues be disposed of at sea or elsewhere?
2. Is the procedure consistent with the provisions of the London Convention and Protocol on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes? Have specific studies been drawn up on the potential impact on marine ecosystems, species and coastal communities?
3. Does the European Parliament intend to inform the scientific community and the general public about the precise processes involved, the identity of the chemicals that will end up in the sea, and potential impacts on the marine environment?
4. Does it intend to closely monitor the operation and help to find safer methods of destroying these chemical weapons? (Chrysogelos, 2014).

On 28 January, MIA KRETE made a second announcement where they claimed to put the issue down to its 'real dimensions' (Papadakis, 2014). In that second announcement (see MIA KRETE, 2014b) the group started by acknowledging that the destruction of the Syrian chemicals will take place on board a US vessel, 500 km away from Crete, on International water, and that there are continuous re-assurances by OPCW that there will not be any sea waste disposal. Instead, the produced chemical waste would be transferred to land facilities in Germany and England for final processing. However, they continued with the following:

Our concern now is centred on the fact that this is the first time that the hydrolysis of precursor substances for the production of sarin and mustard gas will take place at semi-enclosed sea like the Mediterranean. Although OPCW claims that this is the best possible solution, *concerns expressed by Greek scientists on the maturity of the technology makes us to assume that there might be a risk of misplacement.* The protests and concerns that have been expressed must continue as they are very useful in forcing the EU and others to get involved in monitoring the project and OPCW in intensifying its concentration. We are going to follow all developments and we shall intervene if necessary and at the extent that our abilities allow us to do (my translation and emphasis in italics).

On the role of Greek scientists, the immediate thought that one can have is the concern raised by Beck (1992) of the democratisation of science. Why Greek scientists should be trusted more in their concerns than other, perhaps of international standing, scientists. Who were these Greek scientists who disputed the suitability of the available technology? Our research on this issue only came across a couple of sources referring to unnamed scientists from Democritus University of Thrace, Pissias himself, who put forward his expertise as Professor of Water Resource Management to claim that there was lack of transparency on the security of the chosen method, and to express a fear of the possibility that toxic waste could be released in the sea. This was also supported by Professor Gidarakos from the Laboratory of Toxic and Hazardous Waste Management of the Technical University of Crete, who also claimed that hydrolysis is inadequate for mustard gases and sarin and that this method produces more waste than incineration (see Gidarakos, 2014). However, he also stressed that the procedure should not be seen as an exclusively Cretan affair, but a general concern for the whole of the Mediterranean. After all, the operation was to take place in a long distance away from Crete (Agonastis Kritis, 2014).

Similar concerns were raised by the Greek charter of Greenpeace in the following statement, released on 19 February 2014:

The fact that the only suitable unit for the hydrolysis of chemical weapons is located in a US Navy boat is understandably increasing the level of concern. We emphasise that in this case, it's necessary to inform all the coastal communities as they must consent in the undertaking of any related risk, irrespective of how small that risk might be.

So far, the flow of information by the Greek government towards the Regions, the Municipalities and the citizens has been limited and ineffective. As a result, there is intensity in the reactions and concerns that are spreading in various parts of the country (Greenpeace, 2014).

The response given by High-Representative/Vice President Ashton on behalf of the Commission on 19 March 2014 had as follows:

The destruction of the Syrian chemical weapon arsenal has been agreed and is supervised by the OPCW Executive Council and the UN Security Council, who take all the necessary measures to ensure the highest standards of environmental safety, while proceeding with the destruction of all categories of the Syrian chemicals. This plan is contained in a series of public OPCW documents containing relevant decisions by the OPCW Executive Council. Both UNEP and WHO were actively involved in the planning of the operation.

This method of hydrolysis for the priority 1 chemical precursors has been based on long, successful experience of similar situations. The exact location of the ship provided by the US government in international waters has not yet been decided.

There will be no discharge of chemicals or their effluent after hydrolysis into the sea. Instead, they will be stored on the US vessel and transferred together with the rest of the Syrian industrial chemicals to selected commercial facilities for final destruction by incineration.

The Joint Mission has recently organised a meeting with leading international and national environmental NGOs to explain that the destruction will take place in accordance with the relevant provisions of international and national legislation.

Finally, it should be underlined that the EU and its Member States have been contributing heavily, both financially and in kind, to this operation, aiming at eliminating a category of lethal weapons of mass destruction and preventing a repetition of their use against the Syrian people (Ashton, 2014).

In summing up the first wave of the mobilizations, we see that an initial alert was raised by an environmental citizens group in Crete, which also happened to be affiliated to the O-G, stimulated debate and plans to organise protest mobilizations. Alongside the O-G, Greenpeace raised similar concerns. At the end these actors appeared to accept the reassurances given, but still brought up the 'what if' scenario. Other activists put forward concerns, which were backed up by their academic capacity; but they had to twist the issue as affecting the whole of the Mediterranean and not just Crete. That way whatever mobilizations ensued could also be framed as being part of a much greater campaign for environmental/ecological justice.

*Mistrust and Use of Scientific Reasoning in the Second Wave (March – August 2014)*

After invitation by OPCW, Greenpeace and WWF participated, along with others in a teleconferencing themed on the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons in the International waters of the Mediterranean Sea.

The two ENGOs stated the following in a joint statement that they released in June:

Both the Greek Charter of Greenpeace and WWF Hellas stress the need for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to undertake its role and responsibilities and to guarantee publication of the necessary information. Based on the protection principle and in implementation of the UN Convention for Environmental Impact Assessment, it would have been necessary for a detailed study of any potential repercussions to have preceded the operation. Both organisations declare their opposition to any operations having environmental risks, without going through the necessary environmental assessment and review of alternative solutions and locations (on sea or land).

At the same time, both environmental organisations ask OPCW to offer the necessary information, and to operate with transparency, and always with respect towards the letter and spirit of International Treaties.

For a world without chemical weapons and seas full of life (WWF, 2014). (This is my translation.)

With that statement, it is fair to say that the engagement by these two leading ENGOs to that case reached its peak and conclusion. In substantiating that, it's interesting to note that Greenpeace, an environmental protest group that is known for its spectacular protest actions and media use in adding public support for its campaign issues, did not initiate any kind of protest action in the case of the Syrian chemical weapons. That way the button was left to be taken by other protest actors.

Characteristically, the fishing protection measures, with the prohibition of fishing southwest of Crete, which were announced in June 2014, were immediately seized to draw linkages to the destruction of Syria's chemicals as proof that the operation would be catastrophic for the livelihood of those working in the local fishing industry by Pissias and fellow travellers.

The O-G felt the need to be distanced from Pissias' intercession by announcing the following:

We believe that in every struggle the spread of uncorroborated information, at the end has a negative impact in the struggle, its aims and its reliability. Thus, we consider the so-called “revelations” that the Greek government prohibits fishing in areas southwest of Crete, where Cape Ray, the boat where the hydrolysis of Syria’s chemicals is supposed to take place to be at least unfortunate and wrong. These “revelations” were promoted by the local press and extensively spread online, which resulted to intense concern to citizens and professionals in Crete – and not only Crete.

The actual ministerial directive shows that these scenarios do not correspond to reality: It is not fishing in general that is prohibited at specific times, but fishing methods using bottom trawling and the area of prohibition on international waters under Greek jurisdiction, in which, though, areas southwest of Crete are not included. Most importantly, these measures actually contribute to the most effective protection of the fish-stocks ecosystems of the Mediterranean .... (Giaitsis, 2014); (my translation).

The fact that the O-G have avoided to name the source of that unsubstantiated rumour can be seen as demonstrative of a great feeling of embarrassment and, of course, an attempt to save the party from complete ridicule. However, others did not hesitate from naming the culprit:

In the 40 years of ecologists in Greece, there has never been a single individual from that political realm, to use falsified evidence in order to support his/her positions. That’s exactly what the O-G “representative” (sic) Vaggelis Pissias, who unblushingly supported that the yearly ban of fishing trawlers, from end of May to 1<sup>st</sup> October, for the protection of the fish spawn in the area under the jurisdiction of the Greek state, is linked to the start of the destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons in the Mediterranean (Chrysovergis, 2014); (my translation).

However, even after these misgivings on the quality of the arguments employed in the campaign were expressed, the organisation of protest events, accompanied by statements justifying the action peppered by even more fearful scenarios, continued unabated.

Characteristically in the protest rally organised to blockade the NATO base of Suda bay on 19 July 2014, the Mayor of Sfakia, Pavlos Pollakis, made the following statement:

We believe that the development of this *experiment* contains enormous dangers for both the sea environment and the economic model for the development of the Mediterranean coast for the past 30 years. Imagine what a catastrophe and leak of chemicals in the sea and air could mean for the whole of the Mediterranean (my translation).

Along the same lines, the mayor of Platanias, Yannis Malandrakis, stated:

If the hydrolysis is successful, as they say, the area is in danger of becoming the garbage dump of the whole of the Mediterranean. They will bring into the area the chemicals of the whole world with an increased risk of an accident (my translation; see Newsbomb, 2014a).

The events that followed were the long awaited sea protest, which was organised by Pissias and fellow travellers. On 26 July a three boat flotilla, with 22 activists on board, ventured into the sea to stage an on boat protest. The main objective was to find Cape Ray and approach to stage their protest. That protest action was rather short-lived as the boats were forced to

return to the port of Paleochora in Crete after they left two buoys with the Greek flag to mark their presence at that spot.

Although the action fell short from meeting its objectives, it didn't stop some from making the following statements:

For the Mayor of Sfakia: We broke to an extent the wall of silence. We sent the message that we are against the destruction of the Syrian chemicals within the Greek Exclusive Economic Zone (AOZ) and our support to the people of Syria.

For Vaggelis Pissias: We managed to get in the sea, compose a flotilla of boats and were joined by people with life. *Our objective was to send a message to those who destroy the ecosystem* (my emphasis); (Newsbomb, 2014b).

Even after what could have been seen as an end to the campaign, a Syriza MP from Heraklion issued the following statement:

The government handling of the issue will be proved to be fatal for the future of the country. The willing and obedient government surrendered our seas to the mercy of chemicals. They provocatively ignore the Exclusive Economic Zone (AOZ), to sell out the country's wealth and put the country in danger (Micheloyanniakis, 2014); (my translation).

He continued with fearful scenarios on the possible consequences of the project, such as sea contamination, poisoning of fish, the possibility of complete necrosis of the sea ecosystem; and with a range of serious health ailments that can be caused by sodium fluoride ranging from insomnia to Alzheimer's.

The issue of the AOZ has been also used as an argument by the populist right win party, *Independent Greeks*, and that perhaps substantiates the extent to which some go in order not to lose face in a story with very weak foundations. The remaining text is dedicated to the Suda Navy Base and how the Cretans should resist plans to use the base by the USA in their ventures to Africa and the Middle East. Here there are a set of arguments that any local MP of Syriza could have employed irrespective of the Syrian chemicals issue.

In summing up the second wave, we started by seeing two key ENGOs enhancing their participation in the campaign by making a statement about the existing pollution by chemical waste in the Mediterranean. The button was taken then by E-G candidate in the 2014 European Elections, Vaggelis Pissias, who didn't hesitate to use false claims to boost support for the protest campaign; and local Syriza politicians, who were happy to amalgamate everything to an already existing and active in the context of the imposed austerity anti-capitalist/imperialist discourse.

### *Discussion*

The LUSU under study could fit in the NIMBY framework only when "back-yard" is used in a very broad sense. That was certainly the way that the flotilla organised by Pissias was approaching the issue in order to convince the public in different parts of Greece on the localness of the risk posed by the hydrolysis of the Syrian chemicals. The alleged threat to the livelihoods of the fishing community in Crete can be seen under the environmental justice frame, whilst the claims linked to threats to the ecosystems of the Mediterranean Sea can be placed in the ecological justice frame. The movement entrepreneurs were located in the two Left-libertarian/'new' politics parties of Syriza and

O-G but the opportunity for populist claims was also utilized by the president of the 'Independent Greeks', a right-wing breakaway from the main conservative party.

It appears that the LUSU case under investigation could have very easily been a non-case. One can, of course, suggest from a social constructionist perspective (see Hannigan, 2006) that no issue is a problem issue unless it is constructed as such. In this case, the issue was framed by movement entrepreneurs (see Jenkins, 1983), and it did not attract the attention of the Greek public beyond certain parts in Crete. In addition, it was not supported by other environmental groups in the Mediterranean. In other words the LUSU under study did not move beyond the local as the character of a water-harm incident would have had commanded. It is debatable whether that could have been different if Greenpeace was the quintessential environmental protest actor, WWF and prominent Greens, like Chrysogelos had continued questioning the safety credentials of the project during the second phase. The protest discourse employed by the mobilizers paid homage to a mixture of justice and victimhood claims, which easily veered from the uncertainty surrounding the possible environmental risks entailed in the operation: the threats to the fishing and tourism depended livelihood of the locals, the destruction of the ecosystem, to the general victimisation of Greece in the context global capitalist restructuring.

Had the mobilizations successfully spread among and been supported by at least large sections of the Greek protest milieu, then we could have possibly seen the same impact that the anti-nuclear weapons mobilizations had in increasing the support for the German Green Party in the 1980s. However, the campaign against the hydrolysis of Syrian chemical weapons did not attract the public support, which was envisaged by the movement entrepreneurs active in the O-G. A great part on this issue was played by the luck of general support that this campaign had among O-G ranks. That was partly because the entrepreneurship of Pissias, with the links that he orchestrated between what is an ecosystem protection fishing restriction to the Syrian chemicals destruction, was reduced to a case of false advertising; and although it's too early to assess the impact that this will have in the declining electoral fortunes of O-G, it is fair to expect that the chemical weapons campaign will not work to their advantage.

In relation to the call made by Brishman and South (2014) for the inclusion of social movements and resistance, we followed insights from the discussion on NIMBY and EJM mobilizations; and highlighted the entrepreneurial character of some mobilizations as was stipulated by key studies in social movement theory in the 1970s. Perhaps, the examination of a protest mobilization with greater appeal to the general public, and fewer inhibitions about the quality of the protest issue, would have been better in doing justice to that call. On the other hand, this case manages to showcase the peculiarities inscribed in social movement entrepreneurship in a social context with its own unique dynamics.

### *Conclusion*

The mobilisations against the destruction of the Syrian chemicals in Greece are partially reflective of the tensions of late modernity, but also conditioned by specificities linked to key aspects of the Greek political frame, in general; and post-2010 austerity measures linked to the economic downturn period, in particular. Moreover, the mistrust to expert authorities that marks these types of mobilizations happens to also correspond with a range of certain characteristics of Southern European Societies. However, in the case under study that mistrust was accentuated by certain actions taken by movement entrepreneurs. Attempts to continue with the adopted protest frame, after it became evident that the whole action had not really attracted the public support that was envisaged, were marked by resorting to outright deception or its incorporation in an established

anti-capitalist/anti-imperialist discourse. This is clearly a case where the potential in bringing in new social movements and protest in the study of green harm has been demonstrated.

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